

Gilberto Zorio

Gilberto Zorio (b. 1944, Andorno Micca, Biella, Italy) is associated with the Arte Povera generation, which originated in Italy during the mid-1960s. Utilising non-traditional and unconventional materials, Zorio was a major exponent of this movement and has continued to play an important role in the development of sculptural practice for over forty years. He is primarily concerned with capturing and conveying forms of energy, experimenting with chemical and mechanical processes and material transformations.

In 1973 Zorio wrote: 'Energy ... is the possibility of rendering operative the conscious and unconscious functions of language'. The transience and tensions of the chemical-physical world are explored by the artist; in many respects, he assumes the role of alchemist, enabling the conversion of materials from one state into another. This continuum is openly presented for the viewer to see, removing any element of illusion from the equation. This focus has remained consistent from the genesis of his art right through to the present day.

Time plays an intrinsic role in Zorio's work, as the laws of nature take hold and transform materials over a developmental period. The various media used within his oeuvre include lead, copper, steel, clay, concrete, Tesla coils, compressors, strobe lights, lamps and incandescent objects, which are activated through processes including reaction, solidification, evaporation, oxidation, fragmentation and precipitation. These are presented not as scientific occurrences, but are rather elevated to be considered on a more ethereal, universal level, foregrounding their primordial or even esoteric qualities that relate to the nature of existence, the cosmos and evolution. Blue pools of liquid copper sulphate and yellow solutions of fluorescein crystallise upon a copper rod, or alternatively, a room is illuminated with strobe intensity, which is then extinguished into darkness, as UV lamps reveal constellations of phosphorous marks strewn across the space by the artist – a celestial shower.

Zorio has employed a specific lexicon and visual language in many of his installations, continually using repeated forms, shapes and materials since the late 1960s, which have since become emblematic. These include materials such as cowhides and skins – containing traces of past memories– as well as forms including the five sided star, the javelin and the canoe – all representative of time, movement, energy, transformation, and ancient history. The star, in particular, suggests cosmic, celestial and astronomical energy. Stars are in a constant state of flux, their luminosity changing depending on the elemental fusion of hydrogen and helium. They are also symbolic and metaphorical forms with mythical otherworldly qualities, possessing a sense of dream-fulfilment. Zorio says: 'there is always the dream about the far-beyond but we cannot reach the star'.

The artist triggers a metaphorical journey for the viewer: the intersection of art with science, industry with nature, form with formlessness, and past with future – apparent within each mark and sculptural gesture. Spectacle often activates the viewing experience, and there is a physical quality to the artist's installations that necessitates a holistically sensual reception including sight, sound, smell and touch.

Zorio's first solo exhibition of sculpture was held at the Galleria Sperone, Turin in 1967. He participated in a number of the definitive Arte Povera group shows of 1967-8, curated by Germano Celant, as well as the important exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form*, curated by Harald Szeemann, which reflected the zeitgeist of this period in Europe and North America and travelled from the Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland, to the Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, Germany, and then to London's ICA. This exhibition was recreated by Germano Celant at the Fondazione Prada, Venice, in 2013, highlighting its importance during the twentieth century, and its legacy within the history of art.

Zorio was included in the group exhibition *Theodoron Awards; Nine Young Artists* at the Guggenheim Museum, New York in 1969, and in 1976, the Kunstmuseum Luzern, Lucerne, recognised Zorio with a significant solo exhibition, and a mid-career retrospective of the artist's work followed at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam in 1979.

In 1985, the Kunstverein, Stuttgart, organised a major retrospective, which travelled in 1986 to the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris; Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva; and the Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. In 1992, an exhibition was mounted at the Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci, Prato, Italy.

Zorio's work was represented as part of the group exhibition *Zero to Infinity: Arte Povera 1962-72* at Tate Modern in 2001, and his first UK solo exhibition was mounted at Milton Keynes Gallery in 2008. In 2010, a solo exhibition of his work was presented at the Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Roma, Rome. In 2013 Zorio had a major solo presentation of old and new site specific works at Blain|Southern London followed by a solo exhibition at the Parasol Unit, London. In 2014 he had a solo show at Sonnabend in New York.

A major survey of works by Gilberto Zorio was exhibited at Castello di Rivoli in Italy between 2017 and 2018.

Zorio's works feature within public collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, US; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, US; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, NL; Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, NL; Centre Pompidou, Paris, FR; Castello di Rivoli Museo, Torino, IT; Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, JP; and Tate, London, UK.